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**Brittany Baines**

**Executive Director**

February 23, 2017

**Phenomenal I am, Inc.**

**Testimony on Bill No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

Good Evening Senators Gerratana and Somers, Representatives Betts and Dillon, and members of the Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on Bill No. 7027.

My name is Brittany Baines and I am the Executive Director of Phenomenal I Am, Inc. (also known as PIA), a non-profit organization with the mission to empower at-risk female youth 12-18 years old in New Haven through enrichment workshops and mentoring services. We aim to help build girls up to gain a different outlook of their self and their life which will ultimately change their behaviors and attitudes. I was inspired to start PIA after the federal My Brothers' Keeper initiative had just came about and it made me reflect on how mentoring helped me when I was a teen; how there wasn't a mentoring program for girls available in my community. I wanted to help make a difference and be a part of the change I heard Mayor Harp and President Obama speak so passionately about.

Within our program, Kendra has been a tremendous help and positive role model in Nyeja's life. Nyeja was a girl who didn't feel comfortable opening up, had poor social skills and attitude. Now with a mentor, Kendra has helped improve Nyeja's self-esteem to better her social skills, attitude and communicate better. They have been matched for 4 months and everyone is pleased with the progress she made.

Since the beginning of our relationship with The Governor's Prevention Partnership ("The Partnership"), PIA has gained a great deal of training and technical assistance, in addition to forming new relationships and partnerships which has helped in improving the quality of our mentoring program. PIA now has the tools and information required to meet the various benchmarks of mentoring best practices. With support from The Partnership, we have strengthened our programmatic practices and have built our capacity to serve more youth. The Partnership has offered ongoing training, awarded funding to implement a mentor tracking data system and other informational resources. This has enabled us to better implement, monitor and evaluate a successful mentoring program which is very much needed in our community.

Through our connection with the New Haven Mentoring collaborative, which is an initiative of The Partnership, we have had the opportunity to network with other New Haven area mentoring programs and share ideas on how we can have a larger impact individually and collectively. There have been over 30 mentoring programs who have been invited to participate. Participating in the Collaborative allows PIA another opportunity to improve its mentoring program through this reciprocal support network. PIA has met new people, spread awareness of the program and gained awareness of other programs, allowing us to collaborate and share resources.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify in favor of preserving funding for the Governor's Prevention Partnership and the valuable resources it provides to mentoring programs statewide.